

Madam Chair and Members of the Business and Labor Committee for the record I am Jason Todhunter and I represent the Montana Logging Association.

On behalf of our 500 members who make their living in the logging and log hauling business in Montana I would like to issue our strong support for HB 334. The worker's comp savings that NCCI has rated for this bill will be very helpful to our members to keep employees working and keep competing in the global world of wood products.

The Montana Logging Association has had a very aggressive safety program in place since the 1980's and I would put our member's safety programs up against any loggers in the country; however like other industries in Montana we have the highest rates. Work comp is one factor that puts us at a competitive disadvantage for example when bidding on timber-sales against Idaho loggers in the Libby area. There is nothing more frustrating for a small business owner than to look past their equipment that is setting and watch log trucks from another state drive past their shop.

You may hear that Montana injures more employees and that is the reason that our rates are high.....I find it difficult to believe that Montana injures more employees than all the other states in every job description from lawyers to loggers??? I think it is clear that we need reform in the work comp laws and that is what HB 334 will do.

Often I hear from our members about losing key employees to other states; not because they want to leave Montana, just because it is hard to compete with the wages that are being offered elsewhere. For our folks HB 334 will mean a better chance of keeping employees working and for the first time in a while a chance of increasing employee wages or benefits. Please pass HB 334, with the estimated savings to our comp system this will be one of the most successful "Jobs" bills this session.

Thank you for your time and attention;

Jason Todhunter
Montana Logging Association